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印尼华族同化进程的分析：从新秩序时代到
改革时代

**Indonesia's Ethnic Chinese: An Analysis of
Assimilation Progress from New Order to
Reform Era**

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My late *Akong*,

whose struggling journey from China to Indonesia has inspired me to write this thesis,

and

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摘要

1998 年印尼政府的改革对印尼华族的同化产生了重要的影响，也影响了他们的种族认知。自从“新秩序”时代开始的“强制同化”政策为印尼华族种下自卑的种子，尤其当这些歧视性措施在国家层面上通过立法而被确立。事实上，这些情况违背了印尼提倡多元化的“和而不同”的信条。

本文试图分析从新秩序时代到目前为止，印尼华族的种族同化过程。结果显示政府政策对于少数族群的身份认知有间接影响。根据同化理论，本文进一步抽取了对同化过程有显著影响的可能性因素进行实证分析，结果显示附属于中国相关组织或机构和对土著人民的偏见是影响华人族群同化过程的最重要因素。

与新秩序时代的“强制同化”时期相比，今天的同化过程进展更为顺利，印尼人民也更加能够接受。当印尼人民更容易接受华人，两者交往时同化的阻力就会显著降低。长期来看，同化的过程进展虽然缓慢但却会朝着更好的方向不断前进。

关键词：同化，身份，政府政策，印尼华族

Abstract

The revolution of Indonesia's government system since 1998 brought a lot of significant value to the assimilation of ethnic Chinese and how they identify themselves. The 'forced-assimilation' policies from New Order era planted the feeling of inferiority among ethnic Chinese as the discriminatory practices were consented through the legal government policies on the nation-building base. This condition in fact denied the philosophy of Indonesia's dictum, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), which highly values the pluralism idea.

This study is to analyze the progress of assimilation of ethnic Chinese with the focus on identity starting from New Order to the present Indonesia. The results of my study show the consequential influences of the government policies on shaping identity of the minority group. Based on the theory of assimilation, I also extracted some possible significant variables influencing assimilation, and the empirical result shows that affiliation or familiarity to Chinese institutions and organizations, and prejudice against indigenous people are the most significant factors that can influence the assimilation progress of ethnic Chinese today.

Compared to the 'forced-assimilation' of New Order, the progress of assimilation today is going well, along with the growing receptive attitude of indigenous Indonesians. As Indonesia becomes receptive towards ethnic Chinese, the encounters between the indigenous and ethnic Chinese will subside the deterrence of assimilation. Furthermore, the assimilation is progressing slowly but surely.

Key words: Assimilation, Identity, Government Policies, Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Last year a comedian presenter invited the current vice governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, to his talk-show on one of the biggest national TV channels. Since it is so uncommon for ethnic Chinese to take part in politics, the presenter nonchalantly said that it would be a real proof of democracy in Indonesia if Ahok could be the president of Indonesia. Then the other presenter, surprised and curious upon hearing that statement, asked for the reason behind his partner's remark, and the answer is because Ahok has two 'mistakes': first, he is from ethnic Chinese, and second, he is a Christian. That later becomes my contemplation of the progress of assimilation ethnic Chinese since New Order. How does the ethnic Chinese place themselves after democracy has been implemented? Is the gap between ethnic Chinese and indigenous people still unbridgeable?

It has been 16 years already since the tragedy in May 1998 when a lot of ethnic Chinese suffered as the scapegoat for the economic crisis that hit Indonesia in summer that year. For those 16 years also Indonesian government has stood up as a one of the biggest democratic countries, embracing all ethnic groups, including ethnic Chinese to be part of the nation. The change of political system to democracy or also known as Reform Era, implicitly suggests that there will be a better future for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Yet, how far ethnic Chinese has been accepted in Indonesia is a question that hard to answer.

The history of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be traced back to centuries ago. During the mid of 19th century, most Chinese already settled in Southeast Asia countries as the consequence of a number of treaty ports opened in China. The push and pull factors also explained the mass migration to Southeast Asia, in which poverty and politics turbulence in China were the push factors, and the opportunity for a better life in Southeast Asia was the pull factor. At present, it is estimated that there are more than 29 million ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. The demographic profile and the position of the Chinese in these countries are quite different.¹ Yet, the so-called 'Chinese problem' were happening in most of the countries as a result of ethnic Chinese being considered as a homogenous and inassimilable group who spoke Chinese only, and were politically and culturally oriented towards their

¹ The number of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia countries exhibit divergent percentage of ethnic Chinese compared to the indigenous Southeast Asians. In Singapore, ethnic Chinese constitute more than 80% of the population, meanwhile in Indonesia, the percentage is less than 5%.
<www.ocac.gov.tw/english/public/public.asp?selo=8889&level=B>

ancestral land. For this very reason, ethnic Chinese were deemed as a security risk by the indigenous leaders of the host countries where they lived.

In Indonesia case particularly, the Chinese sojourners, coming to Indonesia for trade and business did not know that they and their descendants would grow to be a minor yet essential ethnic group of this country. Despite the fact that the Chinese minority only constitutes less than 5% of more than 238 million citizens, they hold a disproportionately large role in the business world.²

Regardless of their success on business, Chinese Indonesians still have not got what it takes to be regarded as ‘real’ Indonesian. In the past the process of assimilation/integration of this ethnic group into the indigenous society was disheartened by the Dutch colony with the divide-and-rule policy (Suryadinata 2004:3). They were categorized into two groups: *totok* and *peranakan*³ (Suryadinata 2007:132). However, I believe these two terms are not often used anymore since nowadays ethnic Chinese *totok* become more and more *peranakanized*, and the Chinese *peranakan* are more Indonesianized. Ethnic Chinese have now used Indonesian names and most of them speak *Bahasa* as their first language, yet they are still considered as *nonpribumi* (meaning: not the indigenous people).

It is my intention to bring up my study with focus during and after New Order era. After the anti-communist movement in 1965-1966, Indonesia stepped into New Order regime under President Suharto. Under Suharto’s New Order, ethnic Chinese started to experience more rigid regulations and restrictions concerning their public expression of Chineseness. Along with reference literature on assimilation theory, it is then intriguing to analyze and compare the assimilation/integration of ethnic Chinese during New Order, which promulgated forced assimilation system with the present Indonesia, which is believed to be more democratic.

1.2. Research Objective and Hypotheses

The objectives of this research are:

1. To evaluate the government policies related to ethnic Chinese both from New Order and Reform government in order to assess to what extends the policies have influenced the assimilation of ethnic Chinese.

² The old stereotype of Chinese is that “the Chinese constitute only 3% of the population but control more than 70% of the Indonesian economy” Leo Suryadinata, *The Culture of the Chinese Minority in Indonesia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2004) p. 3.

³ Both terms *Peranakan* and *Totok* have two different interpretations. *Totok* refers to “China-born Chinese” or Chinese whose first language is Chinese. *Peranakan* refers to the local-born Chinese or “mixed-blood Chinese”.

2. To find out significant factors that influence the process of assimilation
3. To evaluate the current condition of Chinese Indonesians' assimilation after the Riot in 1998 by giving a clear understanding of their perspectives about themselves.

The hypotheses for my research are:

1. The policies promulgated from both New Order and Reform Era have affected the flow of ethnic Chinese's assimilation, in particular the freedom of expression for identity
2. The collected independent variables for assimilation have significant value, indicating that today's ethnic Chinese are more assimilated after the overthrow of New Order regime.

1.3. Contribution of This Work

History is like a circle; it may happen again, but people do not seem to learn from it. What makes it important to study about the issue of assimilation of this minority group in Indonesia is because the ethnic Chinese have been the victims of legislative and administrative discrimination and racial prejudice. What happened 16 years ago (May 1998 Riot) has undermined Indonesia's principle of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). The fact that they are still differentiated between *pribumi* and *nonpribumi* by the state adds more challenge of the assimilation process. Moreover, ethnic inequality and racial prejudice, reinforced by ethnic segregation and racial discrimination, have been a source of racial conflict and, more generally, social instability.

The analysis of assimilation ethnic Chinese Indonesian through empirical research is still rare. From this empirical analysis, the significant variables affecting assimilation can be identified. Furthermore, the importance of this study is to give a preview of how assimilation has moved since New Order, as well as to know the status of ethnic Chinese assimilation. By analyzing the assimilation of one part of ethnic minorities in Indonesia, this study could be applied to other minorities' assimilation as well. Hence, social integration and stability could be achieved, or at least ethnic conflicts could be avoided.

1.4. Methodology

This research is intended to give a rough picture about the present condition of ethnic Chinese's assimilation in Indonesia. Using qualitative and quantitative data, this research consists of both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research findings, which is also the answer for the first research question, will be presented in Chapter Three, using the data gathered through library research of government policies. Meanwhile the quantitative research answering the second question will be explored in Chapter Four. Lastly, the entire research will frame the answer for the last question.

1.4.1. Qualitative Research

The details about literary reviews on assimilation history and theory will be elaborated in Chapter Two. Half of Chapter Two will also give a brief history of ethnic Chinese's settlement condition in Indonesia at the important periods of Indonesia's history. Chapter Three will give a close look at the government policies from New Order and Reform governments, and compares the progress of assimilation related to the government policies from both government eras.

1.4.2. Quantitative Research

For the primary research, self-administered questionnaire was distributed online to some national Chinese-Indonesian online groups. Some interviews with several respondents for further analysis were conducted via emails. The result of the primary research is put in Chapter Four, which later will be divided into two parts, descriptive and Binary Logistic model, analyzed by SPSS software. The later will explain the significant factors influencing the assimilation of ethnic Chinese.

1.5. Preview of Each Chapter

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One consecutively talks about the background of the study, the research objectives and hypotheses, the contribution of the study, methodology, and the preview of each chapter. The theoretical framework which will explain the concepts and theories of assimilation, as well as the brief preliminary condition of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia will be elaborated in Chapter Two.

As this thesis is a combination of qualitative and quantitative studies, each study will be dealt in separate chapters. Chapter Three will present the qualitative data of the government

policies during the New Order era and the Reform government. Meanwhile, the quantitative research from questionnaire data will be explained in Chapter Four. The comparative analysis of assimilations from both eras: New Order and Reform, will be elaborated in Chapter Five. Finally, Chapter Six will be the conclusion of the comparative research of my thesis.

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Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Assimilation Theories

One of immigration results is that people of different cultural backgrounds come to live together in one geographical place. In the early 20th century, assimilation was already presumed by social researchers as an inevitable result of this continuous interaction between migrants and the host society. American sociologists have analyzed the study of migrants assimilation at length. Assimilation theory started to emerge when U.S. sociologists tried to understand the relations between the European immigrants, as well as their descendant and the majority group in U.S. at the beginning of the 20th century. Early studies postulated the idea of American melting pot⁴, which is a standard alteration where groups of immigrants became absorbed by American set of values and cultures (Melting Pot America). Robert E. Park and E.W. Burgess explained the definition of assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” (Park and Burgess 1969: 735) Park and Burgess’ assimilation theory does not require the erasure of all signs of ethnic origins, they emphasize to equate assimilation with transformations and changes that bring an ethnic minority into the mainstream of the host society.

Later Park altered the definition of assimilation he proposed before; he then limited the referent of the word assimilation to the realm of cultural behavior and secondary relationship: “the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence.” (Park, 1930: 281). According to Park (1930), an immigrant in USA is considered assimilated already if he has attained the language and the social habits of the host community and can take part, without encountering any prejudice, in the common life, economic and political.

The concept of ethnic group is built up in history, molded by the sense of peoplehood, containing social structure and culture. This formula of ethnic group is what distinguishes one ethnic group from other groups. (Gordon 1964: 30). “Social scientist define culture as the social heritage of man—the ways of acting and the ways of doing things which are passed down from one generation to the next, not through genetic inheritance but by formal and

⁴ The phrase ‘melting pot’ was coined by Israel Zangwill in his 1908 play of the same name.

informal methods of teaching and demonstration” (Gordon 1964: 32). A lot of scholars and experts emphasized the importance of cultural and social blending of the minority group into the host society as the sole ingredient of assimilation.

Another theory is the Straight-line assimilation, which is a notion of migrants’ becoming more similar in norms, values, characteristics and behaviors with the host society after certain period of time. This thought came to be introduced again later by Gans (1997)’s empirical research, claiming that the assimilation of the first generation is much slower compared to the next generations. In other words, the longer migrants stay with the majority group, the more similarities both groups share.

Nevertheless, this analysis of straight-line assimilation came under attack in the 1950s and 1960s since a larger number of immigrants in U.S. also came from places outside of Europe, creating more models of assimilation to be explored. Among these, American sociologist Milton Gordon’s work (1964) is regarded as the most theoretically comprehensive. Besides the acculturation, which is defined as a situation when a minority group’s cultural and behavioral qualities become more similar with the dominant group’s (Gordon 1964: 70-71), he also mentioned several other stages that follow: structural assimilation, defined as the major acceptance into groups, clubs and institutions of the host society, is the key point in assessing if a minority community has been ‘assimilated’. As the result of the minority group’s acceptance into the host society, amalgamation, indicating large-scale intermarriage among the ethnic groups, follows after. Later the minority group will associate and identify themselves with the host society’s identity. The final indication is the ending of prejudice, discrimination and value conflicts against the minor group. Nevertheless, Gordon argues that acculturation may occur without being followed by a further process of assimilation. He found in the 1960s that acculturation had taken place in America but not further assimilation (Gordon 1964: 110).

Table 2.1. The Assimilation Variables

Sub process or Condition	Type or Stage of Assimilation	Special Term
Change of cultural patterns to those of host society	Cultural or behavioral assimilation	Acculturation
Large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level	Structural Assimilation	None
Large-scale intermarriage	Marital assimilation	Amalgamation
Development of sense of peoplehood based	Identificational assimilation	None

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